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Supporting Teacher Leadership

The recent EIS policy paper, *The EIS & Leadership in Schools* marked an important development in meeting the aspirations of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*. EIS policy on leadership underlines the important contribution all teachers can make to enhancing learning and teaching in Scottish schools today. The EIS has now set up a partnership with the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh to support the development of teachers as leaders in school through an innovative programme, the PG Certificate in Developing Leadership and Learning, specifically designed for unpromoted teachers wishing to develop their leadership role. Here, **Christine Forde** (University of Glasgow) and **Deirdre Torrance** (University of Edinburgh) explore the support available in promoting teacher leadership.

At first glance the idea of 'teacher leadership' might seem to be a contradictory idea. Senior and middle management posts carry substantial responsibility for the effective organization of the school, faculty or department to ensure effective learning for all. But teacher leaders' roles complement the responsibilities of these posts by drawing on the strengths and skills of teachers, especially on the expertise that teachers have in teaching and learning.

diverted away from the core work of the school, that is teaching and learning. However, teacher leadership must be clearly focused on this core work of the school. Teacher leadership is centrally about drawing from and, at the same time, extending each teacher's expertise in teaching and learning to enable a school to realize its aims in ensuring effective learning for all pupils.

The two key characteristics of teacher leadership are, firstly, the development of expertise in pedagogy and, secondly, skill in collaborating and leading development in learning.

There are many examples of teacher leadership roles established in schools:

- undertaking an action-enquiry on a specific school or faculty development in teaching and exploring the outcomes with colleagues
- collaborating with colleagues in a development team investigating an aspect of teaching and learning
- joint planning and review of a curriculum programme
- teachers attending CPD and then working with other teachers to trial and review new strategies
- developing expertise in a particular curricular area and working with colleagues to develop this area in their classrooms
- teachers supporting each other in the development of their teaching through peer observation or peer mentoring
- teachers acting as mentors to probationary teachers looking closely at the development of teaching in the classroom
- teachers working in pairs or small groups to self-evaluate their teaching
- teachers working together to plan and deliver professional development sessions based on the exploration of learning and teaching in their classrooms.

Studies on school improvement have pointed to the importance of collaboration where the staff in a school work together to build strategies and to seek solutions to the barriers to learning many pupils experience. TP21 and *A Curriculum for Excellence* have now opened up opportunities for all teachers to be involved in decisions about teaching and learning; but we need to consider how we can best develop approaches that ensure teachers are able to contribute their expertise effectively and are encouraged and supported to do so. It is here that teacher leadership is of crucial importance.

Teachers may well be involved in leadership in different ways at different periods in their career. This process of teacher leadership is flexible with different teachers in a school at different points in their career taking on and developing new leadership roles. This flexibility is a source of considerable strength in teacher leadership allowing new ideas, new energies and interests to come together in different groups to make new and valuable connections which foster effective learning for pupils. Teacher leadership can be exercised in different ways: some teachers find more extensive roles challenging and rewarding; others collaborate with colleagues in the ongoing development of learning in the classroom; others carry out specific tasks with a clear endpoint.

Fostering Expertise

A concern often expressed about teacher leadership or distributed leadership is that teachers' attention will be

" Never thought I'd enjoy a work orientated Saturday morning so much... Great to meet like-minded and friendly colleagues "



Challenges

Teacher leadership is a challenging idea and it needs to be fostered within a school. One of the challenges is the balancing of trust and accountability. For teacher leadership to flourish there has to be a high degree of trust on the part of senior school staff who have to enable teachers to take initiatives to contribute to the development of the school and of teaching and learning while at the same time ensuring teachers exercise this leadership towards the shared goals of the school.

The idea of 'sharing good practice' is frequently discussed as a means of taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. There is no doubt that this is a valuable process and there is an element of sharing ideas and practices in the examples above. However, there is a danger that if this is the only mode of development, teachers will be expected to take ideas and simply apply these to their own setting. Teaching and learning is deeply contextualized and so we need instead a richer notion of how we can enhance learning and teaching in the classroom. By looking closely at their pedagogy and at the pupils' experiences, teachers can develop approaches that work within their specific context. It is through these investigative approaches that teacher leaders enable their colleagues to deepen their pedagogy and improve the quality of the pupil learning experiences.

The partnership programme

Fostering teacher leadership is the central focus of the new programme developed by the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh in partnership with the EIS. This new programme is designed to support teachers wishing to build their confidence and practice as leaders. It is intended both for teachers who aspire to or are in the early stages of developing their leadership role, as well as for experienced teachers seeking to enhance their skills in working collaboratively.

The certificate programme has three courses:

- Developing as a leader
- Working collaboratively
- Leading a development project

The programme is designed with the intention that, through the three courses, participants will have the opportunity to develop specific aspects of the teacher role for a teacher leadership role.

This programme is currently being piloted with a cohort now enrolled in each of the universities. An important aspect of the programme is the utilisation by course members of opportunities to develop their leadership and collaborative skills in their own school. As part of the fostering of partnership, EIS learning representatives will be playing an important role in enabling course members to set up network meeting to work and learn collaboratively. From the initial pilot, the signs so far are very positive with the pilot cohorts saying that Course 1 provides a "great opportunity to discuss with colleagues" within a "positive atmosphere" exploring "a good variety of activities". One participant summed up the general feeling of the cohorts by reflecting, "Never thought I'd enjoy a work-orientated Saturday morning so much. Great to meet like-minded and friendly colleagues". While another reflected on the range of support provided for participants, "Very insightful, informative. Logical links and progressions from self study guide to seminar activities to written exercises".

As part of ongoing efforts to explore modes of delivery which will appeal to different cohorts, we are hoping to offer Course 1 as a three day non residential summer school experience in late July or early August 2010. ●

If you would like further details of the PG Certificate in Developing Leadership and Learning, please contact:

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